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ABSTRACT

The following suggestions may be helpful to school administrators in their initial decisions about providing for Vietnamese students: (1) In basic English, inform families of school name and location, date of enrollment, and principal's name; (2) Convene a task force immediately of persons who will have initial contact with the enrolling Vietnamese student; (3) Make sure that from the first day in school, each Vietnamese student is able to communicate freely with someone in the institution; (4) Identify several teachers who can provide the most secure classroom situation for the students; (5) Provide for the teaching of English to Vietnamese students; (6) Provide for the inservice education of all staff members involved in the education of Vietnamese students; (7) Encourage each school campus receiving a Vietnamese student to prepare a structured orientation program for the school; (8) Plan procedures for assessing English-language ability; (9) Plan procedures for assessing reading and writing skills. (Author/DB)

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EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR SERIES: On Assimilating Vietnamese and Cambodian Students into U.S. Schools

During the 1975-76 school year, schools in the United States will have a unique opportunity to serve thousands of children of Vietnamese refugee families. Within a few short weeks these children were uprooted from their homes, some from their families, all from a way of life which was familiar. They have since experienced a long journey, temporary location on a military base, and resettlement in new surroundings.

American citizens can be counted on to extend refuge, subsistence, and friendship to these newcomers. American schools, long accustomed to providing for the special needs of students, will be asked to enroll Vietnamese students, make them feel as comfortable as possible, and to insure their access to educational opportunity.

The Center for Applied Linguistics has contracted with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to establish and operate a National Indochinese Clearinghouse for a period of six months (August 1975 - January 1976). The Clearinghouse will assist with the language and educational problems of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees by collecting, analyzing and disseminating information on subjects such as English as a second language, bilingual education, Vietnamese language and culture, language assessment, reading attainment, etc.

The following information may be helpful to you as a school administrator in your initial decisions about providing for Vietnamese students. Additional information will be sent to you from the Indochinese Clearinghouse during the next six months, the critical decision-making time.

Your basic policy will likely be to assist students to become a significant part of the school as rapidly as possible while meeting their special needs. Among your first questions will be: How many existing activities can the new students be included in immediately? Which members of the faculty and student group can be counted on to provide that special help which will mean so much to the students in the first days? How can they be organized to provide this assistance? What will be the best policy for grade placement of the children? How can the school provide for their special language needs? How can the school provide the soundest information about the American way of life? What staff members already employed and what outside personnel will provide the greatest assistance during the first critical weeks?

The following suggestions will provide some early assistance to you and your staff. On most of the suggestions the Center will provide additional infor-

mation in the next few weeks.

1. Prepare information in the most basic English possible to provide to families telling which school a student should enter, the location of the school, the principal to contact, and the date of enrollment. Having available at the central office an individual who can speak the Vietnamese language would be highly valuable.

2. Convene a task force immediately of persons who will have initial contact with the enrolling Vietnamese student. The principal and counselor of receiving schools will need to decide first on grade placement policy. Believing that grade placement should depend largely on the student's ability to perform skills and manage concepts appropriate to a given level, the Clearinghouse will shortly send out information on a series of possible placement tests which you may use. The Vietnamese student should, as much as possible, be with students near his own age. Teachers should be reminded that concepts can be handled on many levels of difficulty and in language with a wide range of complexity. While the student is learning the English language, he can also be transferring already-developed reading and mathematical skills to English and extending already-learned concepts through the use of different materials and simpler forms of his new language. The Center's suggestions for grade placement will be based on the principle that the school should build upon what the student already knows, and should keep him in as close communication as possible with his peer group. Students may not have had time to get school records out of Vietnam. The Clearinghouse will include information about the curriculum in Vietnamese schools in a forthcoming bulletin.

3. Make sure that from the first day in school, each Vietnamese student is able to communicate freely with someone in the institution. Since finding employment is a critical need of Vietnamese adult refugees and since many of the refugees are teachers, it would serve several purposes if the school would hire at least one Vietnamese teacher aide for each building where Vietnamese students are enrolled. Even when a primary goal of the school is to assist the student in learning the language of this country as rapidly as possible, the student and his family will still have a desperate need to communicate successfully with the school. Furthermore, a Vietnamese aide will be able to provide valuable insights to the school about the student's background, feelings, and needs. The publication A Personnel Resources Directory for the Education of Vietnamese Refugees, available from the Center for Applied Linguistics, will provide a list of possible applicants.

4. Identify several teachers who can provide the most secure classroom situation for the students. Some teachers are more flexible, more open to different kinds of students, more interested in individual differences than others. These will likely be more successful with Vietnamese students initially while more help is on the way. These teachers can then join the task force mentioned in Point 2 for both short and long-range planning. The Vietnamese aide should be assigned to one or more of these teachers.

5. Provide for the teaching of English to Vietnamese students. Each school will have as a priority responsibility the offering of instruction in English as a second language (ESL) to refugees, or the establishment of a bi-

lingual education program for refugees. The school cannot assume that merely placing a student in an English-speaking environment will do the job. Most young children will learn English rapidly in such an environment; the older the student is, however, the greater the need for direct and skillful instruction in English. If the school chooses the ESL route, and one or more members of the faculty are prepared to teach English as a second language, they may be assigned the role of working with Vietnamese children. If no trained personnel are available, the school district should plan to secure assistance from outside immediately in the form of consultants or a careful study of pertinent literature on the subject. The Indochinese Clearinghouse can provide a list of possible consultants in various regions of the country as well as bibliographies of basic materials and existing instructional materials. A significant part of the school's in-service program relative to serving Vietnamese students should include a study of the basic principles of teaching English as a second language and/or bilingual/bicultural education. Specialists in these fields generally recommend that second language instruction be done by a classroom teacher in connection with other skill and concept development rather than pulling the student out for special instruction which is unrelated to other school work. The school should recognize the need for well-informed specialists in English as a second language or bilingual education to provide special instruction to students directly related to his other school work and coordination with other teachers who are working with Vietnamese children. The school will be walking a line between segregating the Vietnamese student from the classroom situation which will most enhance his learning of English, and getting to him the services of one or more specialists who can accelerate his learning of English. Language program needs are complex and will need the services of well-trained individuals who can advise the school of the most efficient procedures.

6. Provide for the in-service education of all staff members involved in the education of Vietnamese students. Materials coming from the Center's Clearinghouse should provide the basis for a rich program. A study of the publication A Handbook for Teachers of Vietnamese Students: Hints for Dealing with Cultural Differences in Schools, and the English-to-Vietnamese phrase books, already published, would be a natural beginning point. The Center can also refer the school to consultants who can conduct programs consistent with the school's needs. The school should keep in mind that the enrollment of Vietnamese students is one instance of a situation occurring with increasing frequency in American schools -- providing educational opportunity to populations new to a given area, particularly those populations from different cultural and linguistic background. The details of the culture and language differ with each group, but the principles employed in adapting the curriculum for new groups are essentially the same. The in-service program the school prepares has a greater implication than just providing for the three or the one hundred Vietnamese students who have just enrolled. Such in-service education prepares a staff to deal more effectively with all students in the school whose language and culture are different from that generally expected by the school.

7. Encourage each school campus receiving a Vietnamese student to prepare a structured orientation program for the school. The school setting itself will be different from that previously experienced by the Vietnamese student. He needs to learn as soon as he comes to school where things are,

how both classes and extra-curricular activities are operated, and where he can go for special help. The bilingual Vietnamese aide mentioned above can be most important here. Valuable both to the Vietnamese students and his peer-group American counterparts would be to set in motion a program where American students take a major share of the responsibility of making the new students feel welcome and at home.

8. Plan procedures for assessing English-language ability. The Clearinghouse has prepared an annotated list of tests of oral language ability in English, a bibliography of materials on language testing, and a sample of informal inventories which can be used in determining how proficient a Vietnamese student is in the use of English. Experience in the educational programs of the camp where refugees have been living reveal variation at all ages ranging from no proficiency in English at all to quite good command of the language. Determining an appropriate program for second language instruction will depend upon assessment of present ability.

9. Plan procedures for assessing reading and writing skills. The Clearinghouse has a forthcoming bulletin which should provide help to the school in determining the ability of the Vietnamese student to read and write both in English and in Vietnamese (or Cambodian). Teachers should remember that the appropriate program for a literate Indochinese student who speaks little or no English is to either teach him English as a second language, transferring his already-developed reading and writing skills to the English language, or to enroll him in a bilingual English/Vietnamese or English/Cambodian program. Hopefully, successful identification of instructional materials in the Vietnamese and Cambodian languages can provide learning experiences while the refugee student is learning English.